

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NODS-00

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O 311451Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 9505
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 05137

EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1, 2
TAGS: MOPS, PEPR, IS, LE, SY
SUBJECT: LEBANON PROBLEM

REFERENCES: STATE 221463, STATE 220266

SUMMARY: TODAY, AUG. 31, I REVIEWED WITH MINSTATE FOR FONAFF ADI YESTERDAY'S MEETING WITH QADDOUR AND CONTENTS SECRETARY'S LETTER TO ASSAD. ADI GAVE SPIRITED DEFENSE OF SYRIA'S ACTIONS AND REAFFIRMED ITS GOALS HAD NOT CHANGED. HE PROVIDED VERSION OF BCHARRE INCIDENTS BLAMING MARONITE MILITIAS FOR TRYING TO INCITE TROUBLE IN BAQAA, BUT ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ADF UNIT MIGHT HAVE EXCEEDED ITS ORDERS AND INCIDENT BEING INVESTIGATED. I STRESSED URGENCY OF PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT WOULD CALM FEARS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS AND OF IMMEDIATE HALT TO MILITARY OPERATIONS. ADI, WHILE SKEPTICAL OF PUBLIC STATEMENT, AGREED TO CONSIDERATION OF BOTH PROPOSALS. END SUMMARY.

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1. I CALLED ON MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS ABD AL KARIM AL-ADI AT ONE P.M. AUGUST 31, ACCCOMPANIED BY DCM NEWTON. GAVE HIM COPY OF SECRETARY'S LETTER TO ASSAD AND DELIVERED ORAL SUMMARY ALONG LINES MADE EARLIER TO ASSAD'S PRIVATE SECRETARY DABBOUL (DAMASCUS 5122).

2. ADI, WHO GENERALLY CONSIDERED SENIOR BAATH PARTY RE-

PRESENTATIVE IN MINISTRY (AFTER KHADDAM), RESPONDED WITH FORCEFUL PRESENTATION SYRIAN POSITION ON LEBANON. HE CONFIRMED ONCE AGAIN THAT SYRIAN GOALS ABSOLUTELY UNCHANGED--A STAND BASED ON WELL-ESTABLISHED PRINCIPLES AND ON SYRIA'S HISTORICAL TIES WITH LEBANON. SYRIA HAD NO RPT NO TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT KNOW WHY CAMPAIGN OF SPREADING DOUBTS AGAINST SYRIA'S INTENTIONS HAD NOW ARISEN, HE EXPECTED THAT IT WAS BECAUSE SYRIA WAS BLOCKING ISRAELI AMBITIONS. IN HIS VIEW THERE WERE NO NEW ELEMENTS IN THE SITUATION. SYRIA WAS CARRYING OUT ARAB MISSION TO STOP FIGHTING AND TO EXTEND AUTHORITY OF LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AND SECURITY THROUGH ALL PARTS OF LEBANON. IT WAS NOT TRYING TO INCITE MUSLIMS AGAINST CHRISTIANS; RATHER IT OPPOSED ANY GROUP WHICH REFUSED TO ALLOW IT, AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY IN LEBANON, TO ESTABLISH SECURITY. RE ALLEGATIONS THAT SYRIA WISHED TO CRUSH THE CHRISTIANS, SYRIAN GOVERNMENT HAD STATED MANY TIMES TO EMBASSY THAT PROBLEM IS MILITIAS WHO REPRESENT ONLY SMALL ELEMENT AMONG MARONITES, WHO, IN TURN, ARE ONLY PART OF LARGER CHRISTIAN POPULATION. SYRIA HAS NO QUARREL WITH CHRISTIANS AS SUCH. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MARONITE MILITIA, IN FRUSTRATING THE ADF PEACEKEEPING ROLE, IS ALLIED WITH ISRAEL, THE "ENEMY OF ALL THE ARABS."

3. ADI THEN PROVIDED SYRIAN VERSION OF EVENTS IN BCHARRE. HE CLAIMED THAT CLASHES HAD RESULTED FROM MILITIA ATTACK
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ON ADF PATROL. ADF FORCES HAD RESPONDED BY SEARCH FOR WEAPONS. ADF CONCERNED BECAUSE MILITIAS HAD BEEN TRYING TO MOVE ARMS AND MUNITIONS FROM BCHARRE INTO BAQAA VALLEY WHICH HAD BEEN AREA OF STABILITY. ADF THEREFORE FELT NEED TO SEARCH FOR WEAPON STORES AND TO SECURE ROAD BETWEEN BCHARRE AND DAIR AL-AHMAR AT ENTRANCE TO BAQAA. ADI NOTED THAT ADF WAS NOW UNDERTAKING INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGATION THAT SYRIA FORCES MIGHT HAVE EXCEEDED THEIR ORDERS. HE MENTIONED THAT ADF COMMANDER SAMI KAATIB HAD VISITED DAMASCUS YESTERDAY TO DISCUSS THE MATTER. HE WAS NOT SAYING MISTAKE HAD NECESSARILY OCCURRED, BUT WISHED TO STRESS SYRIAN WILLINGNESS TO INVESTIGATE ANY INCIDENT IN COOPERATION WITH LEBANESE AUTHORITIES.

4. ADI CONCLUDED SAYING THAT SYRIA RESPECTS USG UNDERSTANDING OF SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON AND HOPES THAT USG WILL NOT CHANGE ITS VIEWS. HE WISHED TO REAFFIRM PARTICULARLY TO ANY CONCERNED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS THAT SYRIA'S AIM WAS SIMPLY TO STRENGTHEN THE UNITY, INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF LEBANON.

5. I RESPONDED THAT DEPARTMENT IN CONSTANT CONTACT WITH

CONGRESS AND LEBANESE-AMERICANS CONCERNED OVER RECENT EVENTS. A PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM SYRIA, RESTATING ITS INTENTIONS AND EXPRESSING A WILLINGNESS IN PRINCIPLE TO WITHDRAW SOME TROOPS WHEN THE SITUATION PERMITTED, WOULD HELP THESE EFFORTS TO CONVINCE THOSE NOW DOUBTFUL OF SYRIA'S INTENTIONS. SIMILARLY, I FELT THAT SUCH A STATEMENT WOULD HELP REGAIN SUPPORT OF MODERATE CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN LEBANON WHO HAVE IN PAST SUPPORTED SYRIAN AND LEBANESE GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO REESTABLISH AUTHORITY OF

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CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BUT WHO, SINCE EVENTS OF EARLY JULY, HAVE BEGUN TO FEEL THAT SYRIAN POLICY HAS CHANGED. I DISAGREED WITH HIS CONTENTION THAT THERE WERE "NO NEW ELEMENTS" IN THE SITUATION. IN FACT, SYRIAN MILITARY ACTIONS SINCE THE FIRST WEEK IN JULY HAVE INTRODUCED IMPORTANT NEW ELEMENTS, NAMELY, INCREASING DOUBTS CONCERNING SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON IN QUARTERS IN THE U.S., IN LEBANON AND IN ISRAEL. I ALLUDED SEVERAL TIMES TO THE PANIC DEVELOPING AMONG CHRISTIANS IN NORTHERN LEBANON, WHO WERE FLEEING AND WHOSE FLIGHT WOULD NOT SERVE OUR MUTUAL INTERESTS OF RESTORING BALANCE AND UNITY IN LEBANON.

6. I AGAIN STRESSED THAT OUR RECOMMENDATION FOR A CEASE FIRE IN PLACE AND NO RPT NO NEW MILITARY OPERATIONS WAS AN EFFORT IN THE FIRST INSTANCE TO REDUCE TENSIONS AND TO LESSEN THE DANGER OF A WIDER CONFRONTATION WHICH COULD IN-

VOLVE ISRAEL. WE WERE NOT ACTING AS AN INTERMEDIARY, BUT
WERE CONVEYING OUR IMPRESSIONS AND OUR RECOMMENDATIONS AS
HOW TO DEFUSE A VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION. WE OF COURSE

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CONTINUE TO SHARE THE GOALS THAT HE HAD EXPRESSED--THE
INDEPENDENCE, UNITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF LEBANON.

7. ADI SAID SYRIAN AUTHORITIES WOULD TAKE OUR PROPOSALS
UNDER CONSIDERATION AND THAT, OF COURSE, PRESIDENT AL-
ASSAD WOULD GIVE CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE SECRETARY'S
MESSAGE.

8. COMMENT: I THINK OUR EXPRESSION OF CONCERN THAT
CURRENT EVENTS IN LEBANON COULD ESCALATE INTO SYRIAN-
ISRAELI CONFRONTATION IN VIEW OF CHARGED ATMOSPHERE IN
TEL AVIV MAY HAVE GIVEN THE SYRIANS PAUSE. ADI SOUGHT
CLARIFICATION OF WHAT I FIRST SAID ON THIS SUBJECT. ON
THE OTHER HAND, I AM NOT SURE I MADE MUCH HEADWAY RE
GETTING HIS AGREEMENT TO A PUBLIC STATEMENT OF SYRIAN
INTENTIONS RE TROOP WITHDRAWAL ALTHOUGH HE DOESN'T HAVE
THE FINAL SAY. I FOUND ADI, THOUGH APPARENTLY A FERVENT
BAATHIST, VERY FRIENDLY AND INTERESTED IN KEEPING IN
TOUCH. HIS PRESENTATION WAS ELOQUENT. SEELYE

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